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Green Berets strut stuff

Visualize a Soviet bloc attack on NATO... vast amounts of artillery fired, masses of tanks coming across the borders, hundreds of thousands of men requiring rations and ammunition advancing.

Then, Special Forces soldiers infiltrate into East Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia; yes, even into Russia, destroying supply dumps, air strips, highway bridges and railway trestles, interdicting the enemy lines of supply, causing hundreds of bottlenecks, slowing down the attack and giving the NATO commanders the time to hold, reinforce and counter-attack. With sufficient well-trained, motivated Special Forces soldiers it can be done. —Green Berets recruitment brochure.

By MICHAEL MCGOVERN
Staff Correspondent of The News

Fort Bragg, N.C.—The Green Berets are back: Back in the news and back in the President's affections.

Just a decade ago, the United States Special Forces—the official name for the Green Berets—was humiliated and humbled. The world watched as its agents were sent home in disgrace from Vietnam, where they "terminated with extreme prejudice" suspected double agents by throwing them out of helicopters at 5,000 feet. They were judge and executioner for village chiefs, businessmen and political leaders thought to be Viet Cong sympathizers.

Since Vietnam, some of the alumni have run guns for nations openly hostile to the U.S. Others have confessed to mercenary work that neither they nor their country can be proud of.

Robert W. Gehring, a former Green Berets sergeant in Vietnam, played a role in the ongoing Nugan Hand scandal, along with a number of high-ranking U.S. military and intelligence officials. The Australian-based banking concern has been linked by investigators to a swindle that involved six continents and bilked investors of millions of dollars. It is also suspected of moving money around the

world for major drug dealers and illicit arms traffickers.

There have been repeated reports that Nugan Hand had ties to the American government, but the CIA has denied any involvement.

A disturbing number of the former Green Berets worked for Edwin P. Wilson and Frank E. Terpil, former U.S. intelligence agents, training terrorists for Libyan strongman Col. Moammar Khadafy.

But even as the government is preparing to bring Wilson to trial on gun-running charges, the Green Berets are getting new life as the military arm of American foreign policy.

PRESIDENT REAGAN has shown an increasing willingness to use them. Today's Green Berets train armies in counterinsurgency—now called Foreign Internal Defense—in El Salvador, the Sudan, Liberia, Morocco and Somalia.

Several other missions are classified; the countries are not named.

The Green Berets trained the Salvadoran troops in the U.S. and in El Salvador this year. They reportedly instructed native troops on the border with Honduras, a probable staging area for paramilitary missions into Nicaragua.

"We're teachers and trainers," said Brig. Gen. Joseph C. Lutz, commander of the Special Forces. "We're providing invaluable service, we've got low visibility and low cost. We'll go anywhere in the world."

The spirit of the Green Berets is still there. They have become a sort of military Peace Corps, roaming the world with books and bandages. But they're still *baaad*.

Green Berets are parachutists. They scuba dive. In the jungle, they can set a booby trap and kill with karate and a seemingly endless array of other methods.

But they also will deliver a baby; play the diplomat while speaking one of the 11 major languages they learn; perform surgery on the battlefield, and fix your teeth in a snowstorm.

"We can perform in peacetime," Lutz insisted during an interview in his flag-bedecked office here. "That's why this business of being mercenaries or hired killers is unfortunate. We don't go where we're not invited, or where the State Department doesn't tell us to go."

Few could be better equipped, or more willing, to train and advise than the Special Forces. Its official history begins with the 1st Special Service force, a World War II Canadian-American strike force that was established and trained by the Office of Strategic Services, a forerunner of the CIA.